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Perfectly Packaged

I hate making mistakes. This seems like an obvious confession, since most people don't find pleasure in the act of messing up, however with me it's different. There is something in my brain that ridicules me every time I make a mistake. The part of my brain that ridicules me is the same part that tells me to not make the mistake in the first place. My brain is on this loop of: I told you so. It greeted me this morning with, I told you so, as I was scrubbing my wrists with my fingertips and lavender soap—his favorite. It wasn't working. I don't know what I was expecting. I wasn't wearing one of those cheap tattoos that I used to get as a little girl from those beauty shops targeted at young girls who traveled in cliques of three. I was wearing the tattoo that was put here by the man with gaping holes in his ears, the one with a studded piece of jewelry protruding from his nose. I remember this man distinctly because he was the man with the needle—he was the one using it to brand me with my boyfriend's name. As I sat there, a thought raced through my mind, Do I really love him enough? It lasted long enough for me to remember but not long enough for me to change my mind.

I think I hated him for it. I really do. I think that's why I'm here now scrubbing my arm with every desperate attempt to forget him. I begin to remember what the definition of insanity is and I prepare myself to stop. It's a thing I do. Every day, I check myself for insanity. I have this fear of becoming crazy. Sometimes I wonder if my fear of becoming crazy constitutes crazy behavior, but if I were crazy I think I would know. I step out of the shower. This is a big deal. This is the first day in a week that I have showered. I remember reading this article that warned us about all these bad things that happen to our bodies when we don't shower. I'm convinced they're not true. I think articles like this just reinforce people's needs to be surrounded by squeaky clean people—those that aren't dirty from their past. I think my boyfriend had that. That syndrome where you can only be around people who have their lives perfectly packed together—everything placed where it's supposed to be, nothing out of order.

He would tell me I was indulgent with my feelings. I never understood what he meant by that. I tried to ask him what he meant once but he shrugged it off, so I gave myself permission to, too. But now, as I am coming up on my eighth day without him, I scramble to understand every criticism he's ever made about me. I'm trying to see where it went wrong. We always fought, usually about me. This time I started the fight—he wasn't getting me.

"How am I supposed to understand someone who is up here," he made a gesture with his long arms in the air, waving frantically above his

head. He always confused me like this, I didn't understand why he couldn't just use his words.

"I don't know what that means."

"It means you're always in your heart."

"See, I never would've known that that was what you meant by waving your hands in the air. It was very misleading."

"You're always in your feelings and it gets exhausting. I feel this. I feel that."

"I just have a lot of feelings. I'm trying to understand them. I can't let go of everything as easily as you can. Don't make me feel bad for that. It's not fair." See, he has that syndrome. The kind that expects everyone to be spotless. But I have residue and it's the worst kind. It's the kind that sticks even after it's baptized in water.

At first I thought that I ended things with him because of the tattoo. I'm still mad about it just not as mad as I am about his condition. The tattoo makes me want to scrub the affected area but his condition made me want to erase everything that I am to please him. I've concluded that the condition is contagious. I think that somehow when we kissed I got it too. Now I only have room in my life to love those perfectly packaged people. I think that's why I had to end things with him.

Neysa Henderson